

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**"MY NOVEL" —
VOLUME 07**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
"My Novel" — Volume 07

«Public Domain»

Bulwer-Lytton E. G.

"My Novel" — Volume 07 / E. G. Bulwer-Lytton — «Public Domain»,

© Bulwer-Lytton E. G.
© Public Domain

Содержание

BOOK SEVENTH	5
INITIAL CHAPTER	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	9
CHAPTER IV	10
CHAPTER V	12
CHAPTER VI	14
CHAPTER VII	15
CHAPTER VIII	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	19

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

«My Novel» — Volume 07

BOOK SEVENTH

INITIAL CHAPTER

MR. CAXTON UPON COURAGE AND PATIENCE

"What is courage?" said my uncle Roland, rousing himself from a revery into which he had fallen, after the Sixth Book in this history had been read to our family circle.

"What is courage?" he repeated more earnestly. "Is it insensibility to fear? That may be the mere accident of constitution; and if so, there is no more merit in being courageous than in being this table."

"I am very glad to hear you speak thus," observed Mr. Caxton, "for I should not like to consider myself a coward; yet I am very sensible to fear in all dangers, bodily and moral."

"La, Austin, how can you say so?" cried my mother, firing up; "was it not only last week that you faced the great bull that was rushing after Blanche and the children?"

Blanche at that recollection stole to my father's chair, and, hanging over his shoulder, kissed his forehead.

MR. CAXTON (sublimely unmoved by these flatteries).—"I don't deny that I faced the bull, but I assert that I was horribly frightened."

ROLAND.—"The sense of honour which conquers fear is the true courage of chivalry: you could not run away when others were looking on,—no gentleman could."

MR. CAXTON.—"Fiddledee! It was not on my gentility that I stood, Captain. I should have run fast enough, if it had done any good. I stood upon my understanding. As the bull could run faster than I could, the only chance of escape was to make the brute as frightened as myself."

BLANCHE.—"Ah, you did not think of that; your only thought was to save me and the children."

MR. CAXTON.—"Possibly, my dear, very possibly, I might have been afraid for you too; but I was very much afraid for myself. However, luckily I had the umbrella, and I sprang it up and spread it forth in the animal's stupid eyes, hurling at him simultaneously the biggest lines I could think of in the First Chorus of the 'Seven against Thebes.' I began with ELEDEMNAS PEDIOPLOKTUPOS; and when I came to the grand howl of [A line in Greek], the beast stood appalled as at the roar of a lion. I shall never forget his amazed snort at the Greek. Then he kicked up his hind legs, and went bolt through the gap in the hedge. Thus, armed with AEschylus and the umbrella, I remained master of the field; but" (continued Mr. Caxton ingenuously) "I should not like to go through that half-minute again."

"No man would," said the captain, kindly. "I should be very sorry to face a bull myself, even with a bigger umbrella than yours, and even though I had AEschylus, and Homer to boot, at my fingers' ends."

MR. CAXTON.—"You would not have minded if it had been a Frenchman with a sword in his hand?"

CAPTAIN.—"Of course not. Rather liked it than otherwise," he added grimly.

MR. CAXTON.—"Yet many a Spanish matador, who does n't care a button for a bull, would take to his heels at the first lunge /en carte/ from a Frenchman. Therefore, in fact, if courage be a matter of constitution, it is also a matter of custom. We face calmly the dangers we are habituated to, and recoil from those of which we have no familiar experience. I doubt if Marshal Turenue himself would have been quite at his ease on the tight-rope; and a rope-dancer, who seems disposed to scale the heavens with Titanic temerity, might possibly object to charge on a cannon."

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"Still, either this is not the courage I mean, or it is another kind of it. I mean by courage that which is the especial force and dignity of the human character, without which there is no reliance on principle, no constancy in virtue,—a something," continued my uncle, gallantly, and with a half bow towards my mother, "which your sex shares with our own. When the lover, for instance, clasps the hand of his betrothed, and says, 'Wilt thou be true to me, in spite of absence and time, in spite of hazard and fortune, though my foes malign me, though thy friends may dissuade thee, and our lot in life may be rough and rude?' and when the betrothed answers, 'I will be true,' does not the lover trust to her courage as well as her love?"

"Admirably put, Roland," said my father. "But a propos of what do you puzzle us with these queries on courage?"

CAPTAIN ROLAND (with a slight blush).—"I was led to the inquiry (though perhaps it may be frivolous to take so much thought of what, no doubt, costs Pisistratus so little) by the last chapters in my nephew's story. I see this poor boy Leonard, alone with his fallen hopes (though very irrational they were) and his sense of shame. And I read his heart, I dare say, better than Pisistratus does, for I could feel like that boy if I had been in the same position; and conjecturing what he and thousands like him must go through, I asked myself, 'What can save him and them?' I answered, as a soldier would answer, 'Courage.' Very well. But pray; Austin, what is courage?"

MR. CAXTON (prudently backing out of a reply).—"Papae!! Brother, since you have just complimented the ladies on that quality, you had better address your question to them."

Blanche here leaned both hands on my father's chair, and said, looking down at first bashfully, but afterwards warming with the subject, "Do you not think, sir, that little Helen has already suggested, if not what is courage, what at least is the real essence of all courage that endures and conquers, that ennobles and hallows and redeems? Is it not PATIENCE, Father? And that is why we women have a courage of our own. Patience does not affect to be superior to fear, but at least it never admits despair."

PISISTRATUS.—"Kiss me, my Blanche, for you have come near to the truth which perplexed the soldier and puzzled the sage."

MR. CAXTON (tartly).—"If you mean me by the sage, I was not puzzled at all. Heaven knows you do right to inculcate patience,—it is a virtue very much required—in your readers. Nevertheless," added my father, softening with the enjoyment of his joke,—"nevertheless Blanche and Helen are quite right. Patience is the courage of the conqueror; it is the virtue, /par excellence/, of Man against Destiny,—of the One against the World, and of the Soul against Matter. Therefore this is the courage of the Gospel; and its importance in a social view—its importance to races and institutions—cannot be too earnestly inculcated. What is it that distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon from all other branches of the human family,—peoples deserts with his children and consigns to them the heritage of rising worlds? What but his faculty to brave, to suffer, to endure,—the patience that resists firmly and innovates slowly? Compare him with the Frenchman. The Frenchman has plenty of valour,—that there is no denying; but as for fortitude, he has not enough to cover the point of a pin. He is ready to rush out of the world if he is bitten by a flea."

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"There was a case in the papers the other day, Austin, of a Frenchman who actually did destroy himself because he was so teased by the little creatures you speak of. He left a paper on his table, saying that 'life was not worth having at the price of such torments.'"

MR. CAXTON (solemnly).—"Sir, their whole political history, since the great meeting of the /Tiers Etat/, has been the history of men who would rather go to the devil than be bitten by a flea. It is

the record of human impatience that seeks to force time, and expects to grow forests from the spawn of a mushroom. Wherefore, running through all extremes of constitutional experiment, when they are nearest to democracy they are next door to a despot; and all they have really done is to destroy whatever constitutes the foundation of every tolerable government. A constitutional monarchy cannot exist without aristocracy, nor a healthful republic endure with corruption of manners. The cry of equality is incompatible with civilization, which, of necessity, contrasts poverty with wealth; and, in short, whether it be an emperor or a mob I that is to rule, Force is the sole hope of order, and the government is but an army."

[Published more than a year before the date of the French empire under Louis Napoleon.]

"Impress, O Pisistratus! impress the value of patience as regards man and men. You touch there on the kernel of the social system,—the secret that fortifies the individual and disciplines the million. I care not, for my part, if you are tedious so long as you are earnest. Be minute and detailed. Let the real Human Life, in its war with Circumstance, stand out. Never mind if one can read you but slowly,—better chance of being less quickly forgotten. Patience, patience! By the soul of Epictetus, your readers shall set you an example."

CHAPTER II

Leonard had written twice to Mrs. Fairfield, twice to Riccabocca, and once to Mr. Dale; and the poor proud boy could not bear to betray his humiliation. He wrote as with cheerful spirits,—as if perfectly satisfied with his prospects. He said that he was well employed, in the midst of books, and that he had found kind friends. Then he turned from himself to write about those whom he addressed, and the affairs and interests of the quiet world wherein they lived. He did not give his own address, nor that of Mr. Prickett. He dated his letters from a small coffee-house near the bookseller's, to which he occasionally went for his simple meals. He had a motive in this. He did not desire to be found out. Mr. Dale replied for himself and for Mrs. Fairfield, to the epistles addressed to these two. Riccabocca wrote also.

Nothing could be more kind than the replies of both. They came to Leonard in a very dark period in his life, and they strengthened him in the noiseless battle with despair.

If there be a good in the world that we do without knowing it, without conjecturing the effect it may have upon a human soul; it is when we show kindness to the young in the first barren footpath up the mountain of life.

Leonard's face resumed its serenity in his intercourse with his employer; but he did not recover his boyish ingenuous frankness. The under-currents flowed again pure from the turbid soil and the splintered fragments upturn from the deep; but they were still too strong and too rapid to allow transparency to the surface. And now he stood in the sublime world of books, still and earnest as a seer who invokes the dead; and thus, face to face with knowledge, hourly he discovered how little he knew. Mr. Prickett lent him such works as he selected and asked to take home with him. He spent whole nights in reading, and no longer desultorily. He read no more poetry, no more Lives of Poets. He read what poets must read if they desire to be great—/Sapere principium et fons/,—strict reasonings on the human mind; the relations between motive and conduct, thought and action; the grave and solemn truths of the past world; antiquities, history, philosophy. He was taken out of himself; he was carried along the ocean of the universe. In that ocean, O seeker, study the law of the tides; and seeing Chance nowhere, Thought presiding over all, Fate, that dread phantom, shall vanish from creation, and Providence alone be visible in heaven and on earth!

CHAPTER III

There was to be a considerable book-sale at a country house one day's journey from London. Mr. Prickett meant to have attended it on his own behalf, and that of several gentlemen who had given him commissions for purchase; but on the morning fixed for his departure, he was seized with a severe return of his old foe the rheumatism. He requested Leonard to attend instead of himself. Leonard went, and was absent for the three days during which the sale lasted. He returned late in the evening, and went at once to Mr. Prickett's house. The shop was closed; he knocked at the private entrance; a strange person opened the door to him, and in reply to his question if Mr. Prickett was at home, said, with a long and funereal face, "Young man, Mr. Prickett senior is gone to his long home, but Mr. Richard Prickett will see you."

At this moment a very grave-looking man, with lank hair, looked forth from the side-door communicating between the shop and the passage, and then stepped forward. "Come in, sir; you are my late uncle's assistant, Mr. Fairfield, I suppose?"

"Your late uncle! Heavens, sir, do I understand aright, can Mr. Prickett be dead since I left London?"

"Died, sir, suddenly, last night. It was an affection of the heart. The doctor thinks the rheumatism attacked that organ. He had small time to provide for his departure, and his account-books seem in sad disorder: I am his nephew and executor."

Leonard had now—followed the nephew into the shop. There still burned the gas-lamp. The place seemed more dingy and cavernous than before. Death always makes its presence felt in the house it visits.

Leonard was greatly affected,—and yet more, perhaps, by the utter want of feeling which the nephew exhibited. In fact the deceased had not been on friendly terms with this person, his nearest relative and heir-at-law, who was also a bookseller.

"You were engaged but by the week, I find, young man, on reference to my late uncle's papers. He gave you £1 a week,—a monstrous sum! I shall not require your services any further. I shall move these books to my own house. You will be good enough to send me a list of those you bought at the sale, and your account of travelling expenses, etc. What may be due to you shall be sent to your address. Good-evening."

Leonard went home, shocked and saddened at the sudden death of his kind employer. He did not think much of himself that night; but when he rose the next day, he suddenly felt that the world of London lay before him, without a friend, without a calling, without an occupation for bread.

This time it was no fancied sorrow, no poetic dream disappointed. Before him, gaunt and palpable, stood Famine. Escape!—yes. Back to the village: his mother's cottage; the exile's garden; the radishes and the fount. Why could he not escape? Ask why civilization cannot escape its ills, and fly back to the wild and the wigwam.

Leonard could not have returned to the cottage, even if the Famine that faced had already seized him with her skeleton hand. London releases not so readily her fated step-sons.

CHAPTER IV

One day three persons were standing before an old bookstall in a passage leading from Oxford Street into Tottenham Court Road. Two were gentlemen; the third, of the class and appearance of those who more habitually halt at old bookstalls.

"Look," said one of the gentlemen to the other, "I have discovered here what I have searched for in vain the last ten years,—the Horace of 1580, the Horace of the Forty Commentators, a perfect treasury of learning, and marked only fourteen shillings!"

"Hush, Norreys," said the other, "and observe what is yet more worth your study;" and he pointed to the third bystander, whose face, sharp and attenuated, was bent with an absorbed, and, as it were, with a hungering attention over an old worm-eaten volume.

"What is the book, my lord?" whispered Mr. Norreys. His companion smiled, and replied by another question, "What is the man who reads the book?"

Mr. Norreys moved a few paces, and looked over the student's shoulder. "Preston's translation of Boethius's 'The Consolations of Philosophy,'" he said, coming back to his friend.

"He looks as if he wanted all the consolations Philosophy can give him, poor boy."

At this moment a fourth passenger paused at the bookstall, and, recognizing the pale student, placed his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Aha, young sir, we meet again. So poor Prickett is dead. But you are still haunted by associations. Books, books,—magnets to which all iron minds move insensibly. What is this? Boethius! Ah, a book written in prison, but a little time before the advent of the only philosopher who solves to the simplest understanding every mystery of life—"

"And that philosopher?"

"Is death!" said Mr. Burley. "How can you be dull enough to ask? Poor Boethius, rich, nobly born, a consul, his sons consuls, the world one smile to the Last Philosopher of Rome. Then suddenly, against this type of the old world's departing WISDOM stands frowning the new world's grim genius, FORCE,—Theodoric the Ostrogoth condemning Boethius the schoolman; and Boethius in his Pavian dungeon holding a dialogue with the shade of Athenian Philosophy. It is the finest picture upon which lingers the glimmering of the Western golden day, before night rushes over time."

"And," said Mr. Norreys, abruptly, "Boethius comes back to us with the faint gleam of returning light, translated by Alfred the Great; and, again, as the sun of knowledge bursts forth in all its splendour by Queen Elizabeth. Boethius influences us as we stand in this passage; and that is the best of all the Consolations of Philosophy,—eh, Mr. Burley?"

Mr. Burley turned and bowed.

The two men looked at each other; you could not see a greater contrast,— Mr. Burley, his gay green dress already shabby and soiled, with a rent in the skirts and his face speaking of habitual night-cups; Mr. Norreys, neat and somewhat precise in dress, with firm, lean figure, and quiet, collected, vigorous energy in his eye and aspect.

"If," replied Mr. Burley, "a poor devil like me may argue with a gentleman who may command his own price with the booksellers, I should say it is no consolation at all, Mr. Norreys. And I should like to see any man of sense accept the condition of Boethius in his prison, with some strangler or headsman waiting behind the door, upon the promised proviso that he should be translated, centuries afterwards, by kings and queens, and help indirectly to influence the minds of Northern barbarians, babbling about him in an alley, jostled by passers-by who never heard the name of Boethius, and who don't care a fig for philosophy. Your servant, sir, young man, come and talk."

Burley hooked his arm within Leonard's, and led the boy passively away.

"That is a clever man," said Harley L'Estrange. "But I am sorry to see yon young student, with his bright earnest eyes, and his lip that has the quiver of passion and enthusiasm, leaning on the arm

of a guide who seems disenchanted of all that gives purpose to learning, and links philosophy with use to the world. Who and what is this clever man whom you call Burley?"

"A man who might have been famous, if he had condescended to be respectable! The boy listening to us both so attentively interested me too,—I should like to have the making of him. But I must buy this Horace."

The shopman, lurking within his hole like a spider for flies, was now called out. And when Mr. Norreys had bought the Horace, and given an address where to send it, Harley asked the shopman if he knew the young man who had been reading Boethius.

"Only by sight. He has come here every day the last week, and spends hours at the stall. When once he fastens on a book, he reads it through."

"And never buys?" said Mr. Norreys.

"Sir," said the shopman, with a good-natured smile, "they who buy seldom read. The poor boy pays me twopence a day to read as long as he pleases. I would not take it, but he is proud."

"I have known men amass great learning in that way," said Mr. Norreys. "Yes, I should like to have that boy in my hands. And now, my lord, I am at your service, and we will go to the studio of your artist."

The two gentlemen walked on towards one of the streets out of Fitzroy Square.

In a few minutes more Harley L'Estrange was in his element, seated carelessly on a deal table smoking his cigar, and discussing art with the gusto of a man who honestly loved, and the taste of a man who thoroughly understood it. The young artist, in his dressing robe, adding slow touch upon touch, paused often to listen the better. And Henry Norreys, enjoying the brief respite from a life of great labour, was gladly reminded of idle hours under rosy skies; for these three men had formed their friendship in Italy, where the bands of friendship are woven by the hands of the Graces.

CHAPTER V

Leonard and Mr. Burley walked on into the suburbs round the north road from London, and Mr. Burley offered to find literary employment for Leonard,—an offer eagerly accepted.

Then they went into a public-house by the wayside. Burley demanded a private room, called for pen, ink, and paper; and placing these implements before Leonard, said, "Write what you please, in prose, five sheets of letter-paper, twenty-two lines to a page,—neither more nor less."

"I cannot write so."

"Tut, 't is for bread."

The boy's face crimsoned.

"I must forget that," said he.

"There is an arbour in the garden, under a weeping-ash," returned Burley. "Go there, and fancy yourself in Arcadia."

Leonard was too pleased to obey. He found out the little arbour at one end of a deserted bowling-green. All was still,—the hedgerow shut out the sight of the inn. The sun lay warm on the grass, and glinted pleasantly through the leaves of the ash. And Leonard there wrote the first essay from his hand as Author by profession. What was it that he wrote? His dreamy impressions of London, an anathema on its streets and its hearts of stone, murmurs against poverty, dark elegies on fate?

Oh, no! little knowest thou true genius, if thou askest such questions, or thinkest that there under the weeping-ash the task-work for bread was remembered; or that the sunbeam glinted but over the practical world, which, vulgar and sordid, lay around. Leonard wrote a fairy tale,—one of the loveliest you can conceive, with a delicate touch of playful humour, in a style all flowered over with happy fancies. He smiled as he wrote the last word,—he was happy. In rather more than an hour Mr. Burley came to him, and found him with that smile on his lips.

Mr. Burley had a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand; it was his third. He too smiled, he too looked happy. He read the paper aloud, and well. He was very complimentary. "You will do!" said he, clapping Leonard on the back. "Perhaps some day you will catch my one-eyed perch." Then he folded up the manuscript, scribbled off a note, put the whole in one envelope, and they returned to London.

Mr. Burley disappeared within a dingy office near Fleet Street, on which was inscribed, "Office of the 'Beehive,'" and soon came forth with a golden sovereign in his hand, Leonard's first-fruits. Leonard thought Peru lay before him. He accompanied Mr. Burley to that gentleman's lodging in Maida Hill. The walk had been very long; Leonard was not fatigued. He listened with a livelier attention than before to Burley's talk. And when they reached the apartments of the latter, and Mr. Burley sent to the cookshop, and their joint supper was taken out of the golden sovereign, Leonard felt proud, and for the first time for weeks he laughed the heart's laugh. The two writers grew more and more intimate and cordial. And there was a vast deal in Burley by which any young man might be made the wiser. There was no apparent evidence of poverty in the apartments,—clean, new, well-furnished; but all things in the most horrible litter,—all speaking of the huge literary sloven.

For several days Leonard almost lived in those rooms. He wrote continuously, save when Burley's conversation fascinated him into idleness. Nay, it was not idleness,—his knowledge grew larger as he listened; but the cynicism of the talker began slowly to work its way. That cynicism in which there was no faith, no hope, no vivifying breath from Glory, from Religion,—the cynicism of the Epicurean, more degraded in his sty than ever was Diogenes in his tub; and yet presented with such ease and such eloquence, with such art and such mirth, so adorned with illustration and anecdote, so unconscious of debasement!

Strange and dread philosophy, that made it a maxim to squander the gifts of mind on the mere care for matter, and fit the soul to live but as from day to day, with its scornful cry, "A fig for

immortality and laurels!" An author for bread! Oh, miserable calling! was there something grand and holy, after all, even in Chatterton's despair?

CHAPTER VI

The villanous "Beehive"! Bread was worked out of it, certainly; but fame, but hope for the future,—certainly not. Milton's Paradise Lost would have perished without a sound had it appeared in the "Beehive."

Fine things were there in a fragmentary crude state, composed by Burley himself. At the end of a week they were dead and forgotten,—never read by one man of education and taste; taken simultaneously and indifferently with shallow politics and wretched essays, yet selling, perhaps, twenty or thirty thousand copies,—an immense sale; and nothing got out of them but bread and brandy!

"What more would you have?" cried John Burley. "Did not stern old Sam Johnson say he could never write but from want?"

"He might say it," answered Leonard; "but he never meant posterity to believe him. And he would have died of want, I suspect, rather than have written 'Rasselas' for the 'Beehive'! Want is a grand thing," continued the boy, thoughtfully,—"a parent of grand things. Necessity is strong, and should give us its own strength; but Want should shatter asunder, with its very writhings, the walls of our prison-house, and not sit contented with the allowance the jail gives us in exchange for our work."

"There is no prison-house to a man who calls upon Bacchus; stay, I will translate to you Schiller's Dithyramb. 'Then see I Bacchus; then up come Cupid and Phcebus, and all the Celestials are filling my dwelling.'"

Breaking into impromptu careless rhymes, Burley threw off a rude but spirited translation of that divine lyric. "O materialist!" cried the boy, with his bright eyes suffused. "Schiller calls on the gods to take him to their heaven with them; and you would debase the gods to a ginpalace."

"Ho, ho!" cried Burley, with his giant laugh. "Drink, and you will understand the Dithyramb."

CHAPTER VII

Suddenly one morning, as Leonard sat with Burley, a fashionable cabriolet, with a very handsome horse, stopped at the door. A loud knock, a quick step on the stairs, and Randal Leslie entered. Leonard recognized him, and started. Randal glanced at him in surprise, and then, with a tact that showed he had already learned to profit by London life, after shaking hands with Burley, approached, and said, with some successful attempt at ease, "Unless I am not mistaken, sir, we have met before. If you remember me, I hope all boyish quarrels are forgotten?"

Leonard bowed, and his heart was still good enough to be softened.

"Where could you two ever have met?" asked Burley. "In a village green, and in single combat," answered Randal, smiling; and he told the story of the Battle of the Stocks, with a well-bred jest on himself. Burley laughed at the story. "But," said he, when this laugh was over, "my young friend had better have remained guardian of the village stocks than come to London in search of such fortune as lies at the bottom of an inkhorn."

"Ah," said Randal, with the secret contempt which men elaborately cultivated are apt to feel for those who seek to educate themselves,— "ah, you make literature your calling, sir? At what school did you conceive a taste for letters? Not very common at our great public schools."

"I am at school now for the first time," answered Leonard, dryly.

"Experience is the best schoolmistress," said Burley; "and that was the maxim of Goethe, who had book-learning enough, in all conscience."

Randal slightly shrugged his shoulders, and without wasting another thought on Leonard, peasant-born and self-taught, took his seat, and began to talk to Burley upon a political question, which made then the war-cry between the two great parliamentary parties. It was a subject in which Burley showed much general knowledge; and Randal, seeming to differ from him, drew forth alike his information and his argumentative powers. The conversation lasted more than an hour.

"I can't quite agree with you," said Randal, taking his leave; "but you must allow me to call again,—will the same hour tomorrow suit you?"

"Yes," said Burley.

Away went the young man in his cabriolet. Leonard watched him from the window.

For five days, consecutively, did Randal call and discuss the question in all its bearings; and Burley, after the second day, got interested in the matter, looked up his authorities, refreshed his memory, and even spent an hour or two in the Library of the British Museum.

By the fifth day, Burley had really exhausted all that could well be said on his side of the question.

Leonard, during these colloquies, had sat apart seemingly absorbed in reading, and secretly stung by Randal's disregard of his presence. For indeed that young man, in his superb self-esteem, and in the absorption of his ambitious projects, scarce felt even curiosity as to Leonard's rise above his earlier station, and looked on him as a mere journeyman of Burley's.

But the self-taught are keen and quick observers; and Leonard had remarked that Randal seemed more as one playing a part for some private purpose, than arguing in earnest; and that, when he rose, and said, "Mr. Burley, you have convinced me," it was not with the modesty of a sincere reasoner, but the triumph of one who has gained his end. But so struck, meanwhile, was our unheeded and silent listener with Burley's power of generalization and the wide surface over which his information extended, that when Randal left the room the boy looked at the slovenly, purposeless man, and said aloud, "True; knowledge is not power."

"Certainly not," said Burley, dryly,— "the weakest thing in the world."

"Knowledge is power," muttered Randal Leslie, as, with a smile on his lip, he drove from the door.

Not many days after this last interview there appeared a short pamphlet; anonymous, but one which made a great impression on the town. It was on the subject discussed between Randal and Burley. It was quoted at great length in the newspapers. And Burley started to his feet one morning, and exclaimed, "My own thoughts! my very words! Who the devil is this pamphleteer?"

Leonard took the newspaper from Burley's hand. The most flattering encomiums preceded the extracts, and the extracts were as stereotypes of Burley's talk.

"Can you doubt the author?" cried Leonard, in deep disgust and ingenuous scorn. "The young man who came to steal your brains, and turn your knowledge—"

"Into power," interrupted Burley, with a laugh,—but it was a laugh of pain. "Well, this was very mean; I shall tell him so when he comes."

"He will come no more," said Leonard. Nor did Randal come again. But he sent Mr. Burley a copy of the pamphlet with a polite note, saying, with candid but careless acknowledgment, that he "had profited much by Mr. Burley's hints and remarks."

And now it was in all the papers that the pamphlet which had made so great a noise was by a very young man, Mr. Audley Egerton's relation. And high hopes were expressed of the future career of Mr. Randal Leslie.

Burley still attempted to laugh, and still his pain was visible. Leonard most cordially despised and hated Randal Leslie, and his heart moved to Burley with noble but perilous compassion. In his desire to soothe and comfort the man whom he deemed cheated out of fame, he forgot the caution he had hitherto imposed on himself, and yielded more and more to the charm of that wasted intellect. He accompanied Burley now to the haunts to which his friend went to spend his evenings; and more and more—though gradually, and with many a recoil and self-rebuke—there crept over him the cynic's contempt for glory, and miserable philosophy of debased content.

Randal had risen into grave repute upon the strength of Burley's knowledge. But, had Burley written the pamphlet, would the same repute have attended him? Certainly not. Randal Leslie brought to that knowledge qualities all his own,—a style simple, strong, and logical; a certain tone of good society, and allusions to men and to parties that showed his connection with a Cabinet minister, and proved that he had profited no less by Egerton's talk than Burley's.

Had Burley written the pamphlet, it would have showed more genius, it would have had humour and wit, but have been so full of whims and quips, sins against taste, and defects in earnestness, that it would have failed to create any serious sensation. Here, then, there was something else besides knowledge, by which knowledge became power. Knowledge must not smell of the brandy-bottle.

Randal Leslie might be mean in his plagiarism, but he turned the useless into use. And so far he was original. But one's admiration, after all, rests where Leonard's rested,—with the poor, riotous, lawless, big, fallen man. Burley took himself off to the Brent, and fished again for the one-eyed perch. Leonard accompanied him. His feelings were indeed different from what they had been when he had reclined under the old tree, and talked with Helen of the future. But it was almost pathetic to see how Burley's nature seemed to alter, as he strayed along the banks of the rivulet, and discoursed of his own boyhood. The man then seemed restored to something of the innocence of the child. He cared, in truth, little for the perch, which continued intractable, but he enjoyed the air and the sky, the rustling grass and the murmuring waters. These excursions to the haunts of youth seemed to rebaptize him, and then his eloquence took a pastoral character, and Izaak Walton himself would have loved to hear him. But as he got back into the smoke of the metropolis, and the gas-lamps made him forget the ruddy sunset and the soft evening star, the gross habits reassumed their sway; and on he went with his swaggering, reckless step to the orgies in which his abused intellect flamed forth, and then sank into the socket quenched and rayless.

CHAPTER VIII

Helen was seized with profound and anxious sadness. Leonard had been three or four times to see her, and each time she saw a change in him that excited all her fears. He seemed, it is true, more shrewd, more worldly-wise, more fitted, it might be, for coarse daily life; but, on the other hand, the freshness and glory of his youth were waning slowly. His aspirings drooped earthward. He had not mastered the Practical, and moulded its uses with the strong hand of the Spiritual Architect, of the Ideal Builder; the Practical was overpowering himself. She grew pale when he talked of Burley, and shuddered, poor little Helen? when she found he was daily, and almost nightly, in a companionship which, with her native honest prudence, she saw so unsuited to strengthen him in his struggles, and aid him against temptation. She almost groaned when, pressing him as to his pecuniary means, she found his old terror of debt seemed fading away, and the solid healthful principles he had taken from his village were loosening fast. Under all, it is true, there was what a wiser and older person than Helen would have hailed as the redeeming promise. But that something was grief,—a sublime grief in his own sense of falling, in his own impotence against the Fate he had provoked and coveted. The Sublimity of that grief Helen could not detect; she saw only that it was grief, and she grieved with it, letting it excuse every fault,—making her more anxious to comfort, in order that she might save. Even from the first, when Leonard had exclaimed, "Ah, Helen, why did you ever leave me?" she had revolved the idea of return to him; and when in the boy's last visit he told her that Burley, persecuted by duns, was about to fly from his present lodgings, and take his abode with Leonard, in the room she had left vacant, all doubt was over. She resolved to sacrifice the safety and shelter of the home assured her. She resolved to come back and share Leonard's penury and struggles, and save the old room, wherein she had prayed for him, from the tempter's dangerous presence. Should she burden him? No; she had assisted her father by many little female arts in needle and fancy work. She had improved herself in these during her sojourn with Miss Starke. She could bring her share to the common stock. Possessed with this idea, she determined to realize it before the day on which Leonard had told her Burley was to move his quarters. Accordingly she rose very early one morning; she wrote a pretty and grateful note to Miss Starke, who was fast asleep, left it on the table, and before any one was astir, stole from the house, her little bundle on her arm.

She lingered an instant at the garden-gate, with a remorseful sentiment, —a feeling that she had ill-repaid the cold and prim protection that Miss Starke had shown her. But sisterly love carried all before it. She closed the gate with a sigh, and went on.

She arrived at the lodging-house before Leonard was up, took possession of her old chamber, and presenting herself to Leonard, as he was about to go forth, said (story-teller that she was), "I am sent away, brother, and I have come to you to take care of me. Do not let us part again. But you must be very cheerful and very happy, or I shall think that I am sadly in your way."

Leonard at first did look cheerful, and even happy; but then he thought of Burley, and then of his own means of supporting Helen, and was embarrassed, and began questioning her as to the possibility of reconciliation with Miss Starke. And Helen said gravely, "Impossible,— do not ask it, and do not go near her."

Then Leonard thought she had been humbled and insulted, and remembered that she was a gentleman's child, and felt for her wounded pride, he was so proud himself. Yet still he was embarrassed.

"Shall I keep the purse again, Leonard?" said Helen, coaxingly.

"Alas!" replied Leonard, "the purse is empty."

"That is very naughty in the purse," said Helen, "since you put so much into it."

"Did not you say that you made, at least, a guinea a week?"

"Yes; but Burley takes the money; and then, poor fellow! as I owe all to him, I have not the heart to prevent him spending it as he likes."

"Please, I wish you could settle the month's rent," said the landlady, suddenly showing herself. She said it civilly, but with firmness.

Leonard coloured. "It shall be paid to-day."

Then he pressed his hat on his head, and putting Helen gently aside, went forth.

"Speak to me in future, kind Mrs. Smedley," said Helen, with the air of a housewife. "He is always in study, and must not be disturbed."

The landlady—a good woman, though she liked her rent—smiled benignly. She was fond of Helen, whom she had known of old.

"I am so glad you are come back; and perhaps now the young man will not keep such late hours. I meant to give him warning, but—"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.